

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chairman, Committee for
Language Development

SUBJECT : Report on the Language
Development Program

1. Your 25 August 1959 report on the Language Development Program is an excellent survey of accomplishments to date and of some of the important problems affecting the program. I appreciate very much the effort you put into the survey and the constructive observations and suggestions you have made.

2. Taking your recommendations in the order in which they appear in the report, I have the following reactions:

a. Voluntary Language Training Program

Recommendation (Page 4): "The problem is to define definite goals for the VLTP and to administer it in a way which will achieve these goals and eliminate the non-productive group. This can best be done by phasing out the elementary courses starting with the common languages; 80 to 90 per cent of the non-productive group are in these classes."

Comment: Agree. Attachment A to your report gives an excellent summary of VLTP and pinpoints some of its deficiencies. Principal among the latter is the waste of energy and effort spent on members of the 101 classes who either drop out or fail to achieve a useful level of language skill.

I agree that we have probably made it too easy for marginal students to enroll in the VLTP. All candidates should be required either to have a reasonable aptitude for language instruction or a pre-existing minimum knowledge before we let them enroll formally in the instructional

program. Additionally, the potential utility of the language should be established before a student is accepted. Supervisors and Career Service Boards should be asked to endorse applications if for no other reason than to eliminate students who plan to resign or who never intend to use their language training for CIA's benefit.

I concur in phasing out the 101 courses in the common languages and requiring thereafter that employees obtain this beginning level of instruction on their own initiative. Students who have to extend themselves in some private effort before being accepted in the VLTP will certainly add substantially to the quality of your student body and the effectiveness of your program.

b. Directed Training Program

Recommendation (Pages 5-7): This section recites problems which have contributed to the shortage of students in the directed training program and recommends "eliminating instruction in all but the seven priority languages listed-- French, German, Russian, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic."

Comment: The thought behind this recommendation has merit. But before any such action is taken, additional study is necessary to be certain that:

(1) External facilities are readily available to satisfy requirements for the languages to be dropped.

(2) Our selections of the seven (or other number) languages to be taught are responsive to the actual needs of the Agency, particularly DD/P.

(3) We won't lose irrevocably a hard-to-find instructor or native speaker who can be retained at modest cost and who might, if lost, have to be replaced in the near future because of an uptrend in training requests.

c. Survey of Language Requirements

Recommendation (Pages 8-12): Here the report proposes a survey of language requirements in overseas, working-level jobs--the survey to be conducted by the Language Development Committee.

Comment: I strongly concur in such a survey. It should be started forthwith. And if it is to be conducted by questionnaire, you should develop the form of the questionnaire and present it to an early meeting of the Committee. However, the survey should not be confined to overseas or to "working-level" language requirements; it should encompass all requirements throughout the Agency.

d. Language Awards Program

Recommendation (Pages 12-13): "There is need to consider whether the /Language Awards/ Program should be continued essentially in its present form with minor revisions to effect economies or whether it should be revamped in its entirety to achieve more orderly language development."

Comment: For the moment, I believe the program should continue essentially in its present form. And I strongly endorse the action you have taken to tighten the standard for achieving the elementary level on the proficiency test.

However, we should continue to examine and weigh the objectives of the program in the light of growing experience. The present concept of awards is to recognize "effort to achieve and maintain language proficiency." I believe it is time to consider shifting our emphasis from effort to utility. Specifically, I think we should look toward the early abolition of awards for elementary levels of skills, certainly in Class I languages. And our scale of awards should be reckoned, not by how hard a language is to learn, but rather by how much CIA needs that language skill and will benefit from the recipient's possession of it.

e. Revision of Language Development Program

Recommendation (Page 13): "Seek Career Council approval of a plan to set specific requirements for language development leading to a revised Language Development Program to begin in FY 1961."

Comment: While I am in firm agreement with the intent expressed here, it would be premature to make such a proposal to the Career Council until we have marshalled our facts and are prepared to recommend and justify the specific plan we seek to have adopted. I presume you have something in mind along the lines of the State Department policy announced in November 1956 which provides that all Foreign Service Officers are expected to acquire a useful knowledge of at least one foreign language by 1962 and will be encouraged to acquire a second as well. You may be thinking also of the proposal that State determine the number of FSO positions in each country which should be occupied only by incumbents who have a useful knowledge of a language used in that country. I believe that CIA must establish policies akin to these. However, such policies must be preceded by more careful study and preparation than we have yet done.

f. Page 13. "Continue the present ☐ Language Development ☒ program under previously formulated plans for budgetary limits until the new program goes into effect."

Comment: Concur.

3. One item mentioned in your paper but about which you did not make a specific recommendation deals with the language testing program. I am very much concerned that 2 1/2 years after the program was launched we still have tested no more than 25 per cent of the Agency employees who claim some language proficiency. It is imperative that we speed up this effort and I am sending the Chief, LAS a separate memorandum on this point.

4. I would appreciate getting by 1 November a follow-up report on the actions you have taken in line with the recommendations

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discussed in paragraph 2 above. I will be especially interested in following your progress with the language requirements survey.

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